

# BIG BEN

W. Post 9/17/95

*A few days  
in the life of  
Benjamin C. Bradlee,  
editor, in which  
the First Amendment  
is saved, Deep Throat's  
secret is protected, and  
a president must take  
no for an answer.*

*Excerpted from "A Good Life" by Ben Bradlee, to be published by Simon and Schuster Inc. © 1995 by Benjamin C. Bradlee.*

## **The Pentagon Papers**

**S**ometime in the early spring of 1971 we had begun hearing rumors that the New York Times was working on a "blockbuster," an exclusive that would blow us out of the water. News like this produces a very uncomfortable feeling inside an editor's stomach. Getting beaten on a story is bad enough, but waiting to get beaten on a story is unbearable.

We heard the Times had a special task force at work on its blockbuster. We heard the task force was working in special offices away

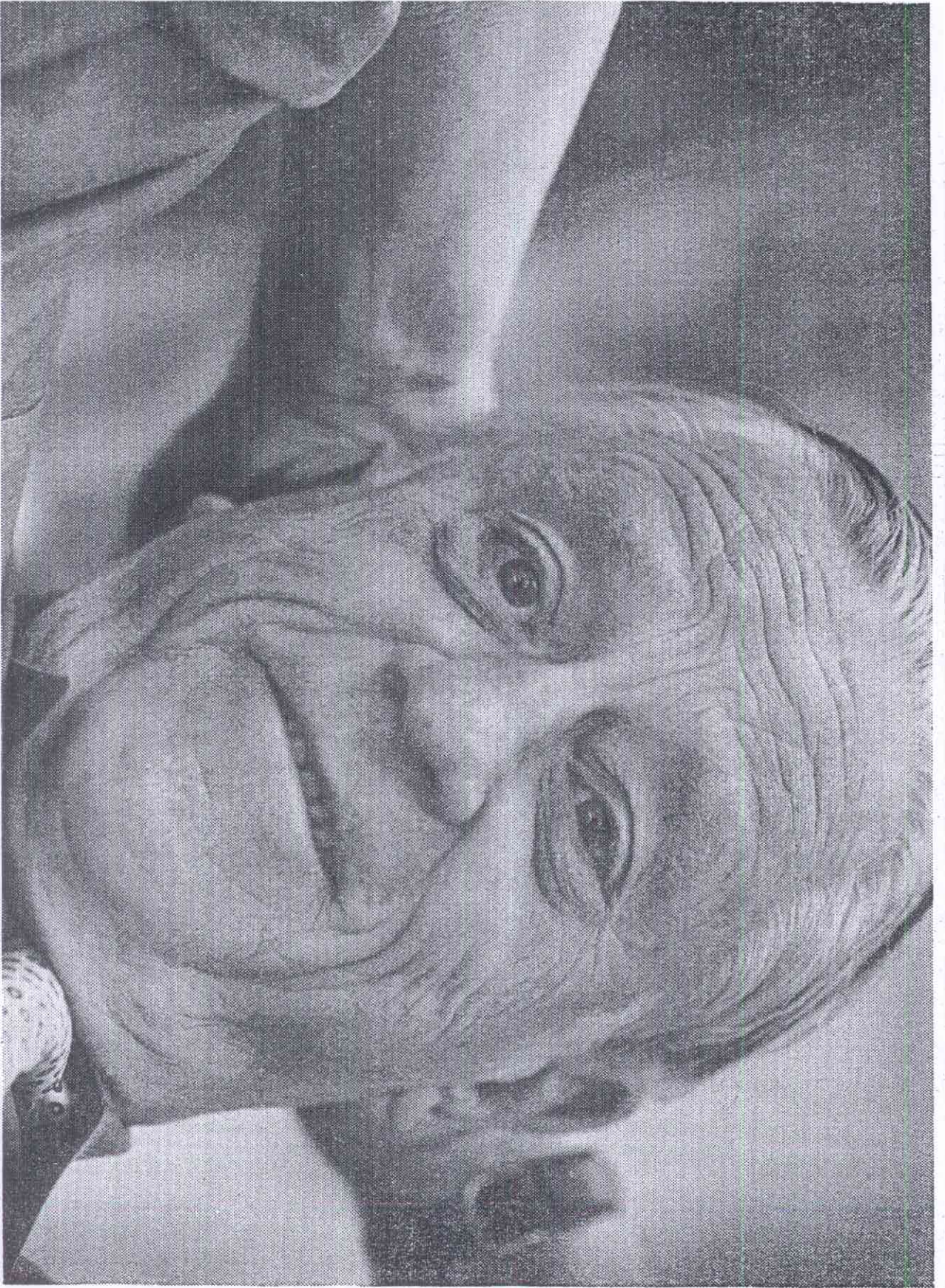
from the newspaper's 43rd Street offices. But we couldn't find out who was part of the task force, much less what they were task-forcing about.

And there was so much news in Washington, we were having trouble keeping up with it all. On May Day the city hosted yet another in a growing number of anti-Vietnam

demonstrations. Post reporters described Day One in West Potomac Park this way: "... at dawn's light ... about 45,000 people were dancing, nodding their heads to music, making love, drinking wine and smoking pot."

At the beginning of June, we paused for a few days to focus on Tricia Nixon's wedding to Edward Cox. The Nixons had refused to accredit Post reporter Judith Martin to cover the White House on the wedding day. They didn't like Post reporters in general, but they particularly did not like stories she had written about the family. Any other reporter, but not Judy, we were told. And because we weren't about to let the White House—much less the Nixon White House—tell us who could or could not cover any story, we insisted on





BY BILL O'LEARY—THE WASHINGTON POST



miliating position of having to re-write the competition. Every other paragraph of the Post story had to include some form of the words "according to the New York Times," blood—visible only to us—on every word.

On Monday, June 14, the next in-  
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assigning Ms. Martin. We covered it from the TV tubes, and nobody but us gave a damn.

On Sunday, June 13, 1971, the top half of The Post's Page 1 was devoted to the White House wedding, but the top half of the New York Times revealed at last what the long-awaited blockbuster was all about: six full pages of news stories and top-secret documents, based on a 47-volume, 7,000-page study, "History of U.S. Decision-Making Process on Vietnam Policy, 1945-1967." The Times had obtained a copy of the study, and had assigned more than a dozen top reporters and editors to digest it for three months and write dozens of articles.

The Post did not have a copy, and we found ourselves in the hu-



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**Bradlee and Publisher Katharine Graham leave federal court in June 1971 after a ruling allowing The Post to continue publishing the Pentagon Papers.**



stallment of the Pentagon Papers appeared in the Times: "Vietnam Archive: A Consensus to Bomb Developed Before '64 Election, Study Says."

While candidate Barry Goldwater was calling for the immediate bombing of North Vietnam, the story said, the Johnson administration had privately concluded two months before the election that he was right. The sustained bombing—known as Rolling Thunder—began three months after the election.

At The Post we had gone to General Quarters and were trying desperately to get our own copy of the Pentagon Papers, or any reasonable substitute.

On Tuesday, the Justice Department went to court and got an injunction against the Times, restraining a newspaper in advance from publishing specific articles, for the first time in the history of the republic. At least the New York Times had been silenced, never mind how.

Wednesday night, The Post's thorny national editor, Ben Bagdikian, was contacted by someone and given a telephone number, to be called only from a pay telephone, where he could reach his friend Daniel Ellsberg.

Ellsberg was the source of the New York Times' 7,000-page copy of the Pentagon Papers, because of his friendship and respect for the Times' legendary Vietnam reporter, Neil Sheehan.

Late Wednesday, June 16, Bagdikian flew to Boston, and first thing Thursday morning he flew back with two first-class seats, one for himself and one for a large cardboard carton full of Pentagon Papers. The Post's package consisted of something over 4,000 pages of Pentagon documents, compared with the 7,000 received by the New York Times. At 10:30 a.m. Thursday, June 17, Bagdikian rushed past Marina Bradlee, age 10, tending her lemonade stand outside our house in Georgetown, and we were back in business.

For the next 12 hours, the Bradlee library on N Street served as a remote newsroom where editors and reporters started sorting, reading and annotating 4,000 pages, and the Bradlee living room served as a legal office where lawyers and newspaper executives started the most basic discussions about the duty and right of a newspaper to publish, and the government's right to prevent that publication, on national security grounds, or on any grounds at all. For those 12 hours I went from one room to the other, getting a sense of the story in one place, and a sense of the mood of the lawyers in the other.

With the Times silenced by the feder-

al court in New York, we decided almost immediately that we would publish a story the next morning, Friday, June 18, completing in 12 hours what it had taken the New York Times more than three months to do. For planning purposes, we had to make that decision so that we could rethread the presses to include four extra, unplanned pages—an operation that cannot be done on the spur of the moment. At 4 p.m., we stopped reading and arguing to hold a story conference, to talk out what we had, and what we could get written and laid out in the five hours left before the first-edition deadline. Our first choice was a piece to be written by diplomatic correspondent Murrey Marder about how the Johnson administration had stopped and restarted bombing North Vietnam to influence American public opinion, not to further U.S. military goals.

But things were a little stickier in the living room.

There, the lawyers were marshaling strong arguments against publishing, or at least urging that we wait for the injunction against the New York Times to be litigated. The lawyers were Roger Clark and Tony Essaye, two young partners in the firm of William S. Rogers, who had been The Post's lawyer until he quit to become Nixon's secretary of state. In midafternoon, they were joined by our own Fritz Beebe, now chairman of the board of The Washington Post Co. My heart sank when Beebe announced that our deliberations were not to be influenced by the fact that The Post Co. had just "gone public" with a \$35 million stock offering. Under the terms of this offering, The Post was liable for a substantial claim by the underwriters if some disaster or catastrophe occurred. No one wanted to say whether an injunction, or possible subsequent criminal prosecution, qualified as a catastrophe. Just as no one wanted to mention the fact that any company convicted of a felony could not own television licenses, a fact that added another \$100 million to the stakes.

The lawyers were throwing a lot of case law at me and my allies: Deputy Managing Editor Howard Simons, Editorial Page Editor Phil Geyelin and his deputy, Meg Greenfield, citing legal arguments that seemed curiously irrelevant in a Georgetown living room, where Marina was selling lemonade, my wife, Tony, was serving sandwiches, and telephones were ringing off the hooks. It was bedlam.

Two decades later it's hard to figure out why the hell the Pentagon Papers had become such a *casus belli* for the ad-



ministration. I knew exactly how important it was to publish, if we were to have any chance of pulling The Post up—once and for all—into the front ranks. Not publishing the information when we had it would be like not saving a drowning man, or not telling the truth. Failure to publish without a fight would constitute an abdication that would brand The Post forever as an Establishment tool of whatever administration was in power. And end the Bradlee era before it got off the ground, just incidentally.

But I wasn't winning with the law-

yers. A federal judge had enjoined the New York Times from publishing the same material, they argued, and therefore we did in fact have "reason to believe publication would damage the United States."

"Bull . . .," a reporter would comment, not particularly constructively.

"Maybe we should tell the attorney general that we have the papers and are going to publish them on Sunday," a lawyer suggested, looking for a compromise.

Writer Chalmers Roberts announced he would quit, and make a big stink about it, if we did that.

I was getting painted into a corner. I had to handle the lawyers, especially Beebe, into at least a neutral position, while preventing the reporters from leaving him no maneuvering room during what we all knew was going to be the ultimate showdown with Katharine Graham. The publisher was getting ready to host a goodbye party for Harry Gladstein, the veteran circulation vice

president, at her house about 10 blocks away.

Suddenly, I knew what I had to do. I sneaked out of the living room to an upstairs telephone and placed a call to Jim Hoge, then the managing editor of the Chicago Sun-Times. Would he please, urgently, send a copyboy down to whatever Chicago courthouse was trying the divorce case of McDonald's President Harry Sonneborn vs. June Sonneborn, starring Edward Bennett Williams for the defendant, and give him this message: "Please ask for a recess ASAP. Need to talk to you NOW. URGENT."

I had known Williams for more than 20 years and trusted his common sense more than anyone else. Fifteen minutes later he called back all business, with a curt "What's up?" Without loading the dice—really—I took him through everything: what the Times had written, how we had tried to match them for three days, how we had finally gotten our own set of the Pentagon Papers, what we planned to do tonight, what the

lawyers were advising us, how Beebe was getting caught in a bind, the public stock issue, the threat to The Post's three TV stations, how we were headed for a Fail-Safe telephone call with Kay. Maybe 10 uninterrupted minutes, and then I shut up.

Nothing from Williams for at least 60 seconds. I was dying. And then, finally: "Well, Benji, you got to go with it. You got no choice. That's your business." I hugged him, long distance, and walked casually downstairs back into the legal debate. When I had the right opening, I told them what Williams had said, and I could see the starch go out of Clark and Essaye, and I could see the very beginning of a smile on Beebe's face. Such was the clout of this man. After another hour of argument it was Show Time, and Fritz, Phil, Howie and I went to the four phones in our house and placed the call to Kay. I didn't want to think about what I would have to do if the answer was no.

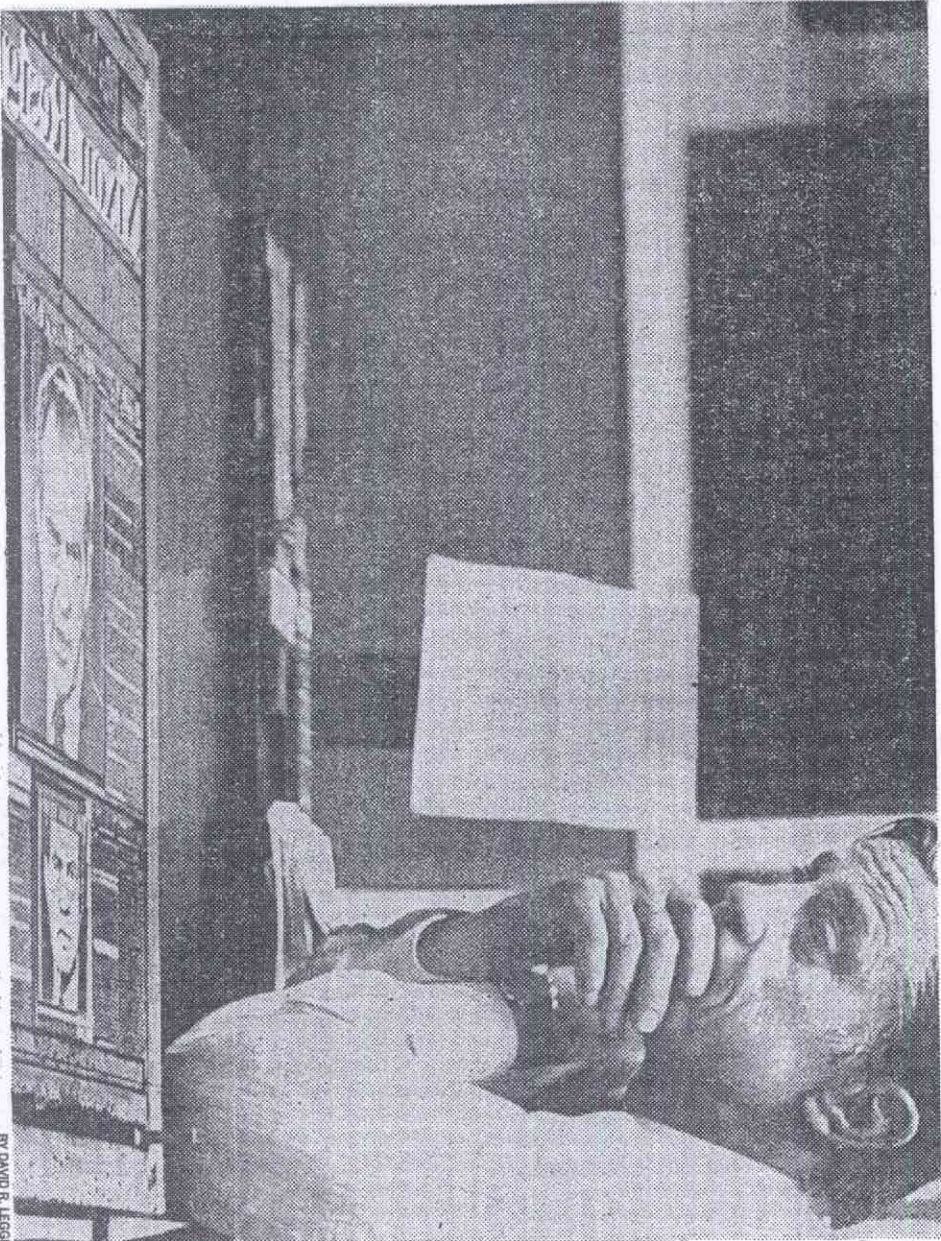
Fritz outlined all of our positions, with

complete fairness. We told her what we felt we had to; we told her what Williams had said; we told her the staff would consider it a disaster if we didn't publish. She asked Beebe his advice. He paused a long time—we could hear music in the background—and said, "Well, I probably wouldn't." Thank God for the hesitant "Well," and the "probably." Now she paused. The music again. And then she said quickly, "Okay, I say let's go. Let's publish."

I dropped the phone like a hot potato and shouted the verdict, and the room erupted in cheers.

The cheers were instinctive. In those first moments, it was enough for all of us—including, let it be said quickly, the lawyers who had been arguing against publication—that Katharine had shown guts and commitment to the First Amendment, and support of her editors. But I think none of us truly understood the importance of her decision to publish the Pentagon Papers in the creation of a new Washington Post. I know I didn't. I





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*"The fact that  
Deep Throat's  
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Bradlee, with The Post  
Page 1, plate on Aug. 8,  
1974, the day Nixon  
resigned.



wanted to publish because we had vital documents explaining the biggest story of the last 10 years. That's what newspapers do: They learn, they report, they verify, they write, and they publish.

What I didn't understand, as Katharine's "Okay . . . let's go. Let's publish" rang in my ears, was how permanently the ethos of the paper changed, and how it crystallized for editors and reporters everywhere how independent and determined and confident of its purpose the new Washington Post had become. In the days that followed, these feelings only increased. A paper that stands up to charges of treason, a paper that holds firm in the face of charges from the president, the Supreme Court, the attorney general, never mind an assistant attorney general. A paper that holds its head high, committed unshakably to principle.

Finally, we published . . . and waited for the Nixon administration's response (and for a look at how the New York Times would handle our story, with an AP wire story, Page 1.)

We didn't have long to wait. Just after 3 p.m. Friday, June 18, with Kay and some editors in my office, I got a call from Assistant Attorney General William H. Rehnquist. After a minimum of I-guess-you-know-why-I'm-calling and I-suspect-I-do, the future chief justice came to the point and started reading what turned out to be the same message he had read to the New York Times four days earlier:

"I have been advised by the secretary of defense that the material published in The Washington Post on June 18, 1971, captioned 'Documents Reveal U.S. Effort in '54 to Delay Viet Election,' contains information relating to the national defense of the United States and bears a top-secret classification. As such, publication of this information is directly prohibited by the provisions of the Espionage Law, Title 18, U.S. Code, Section 793. Moreover, further publication of information of this character will cause irreparable injury to the defense interests of the United States. Accordingly, I respectfully request that you publish no further information of this character and advise me that you have made arrangements for the return of these documents to the Department of Defense."

My hands and legs were shaking. The

See BRADLEE, F5, Col. 1

#### BRADLEE, From F4

charge of espionage did not fit my vision of myself, and all I knew about Title 18 spelled trouble. That's the Criminal Code. But with as much poise as I could muster, I said, "I'm sure you will understand that we must respectfully decline." He said something like he figured as much, and we hung up.

Soon afterward, the Justice Department contacted Clark and Essaye and told them to be in District Court at 5 p.m. The Times editors and lawyers were in various courts, arguing appeals and appealing decisions against them. At no time did they—or we—consider violating court orders, damning the torpedoes and proceeding with publication.

For the next eight days—until just after 1 p.m. on Saturday, June 26, in the Supreme Court of the United States—we were almost full time in court or in various legal offices, researching and actually writing affidavits and legal briefs.

At 6 p.m. on June 18, the government asked District Judge Gerhard A. "Gary" Gesell to enjoin The Post from any further publication of the Pentagon Papers. Two hours later, he ruled for The Post. It took the government only another two hours to round up three judges on the U.S. Court of Appeals to ask them to overrule Gesell. That made it just before 10 p.m.—when we were desperately trying to get Marder's story into the paper and get the presses started. They were supposed to start at 10:15 p.m., but as luck would have it, this night they were late. Herman Cohen, the news dealer who used to take the very first copies of the paper off the press to newsstands in the major hotels, was waiting, waiting, waiting, and the three-judge appellate panel was deciding whether to reverse Gesell's ruling. We figured that if we could get a thousand copies on the newsstands, we could argue that we had effectively published, and therefore any injunction could not affect that day's installment.

Finally, after 1 a.m. on June 19, the court enjoined us but agreed that we could complete the publication of that day's paper. Scenes from the next chaotic days remain frozen in my mind like frames from a Cocteau movie:

- We defendants had to be given emergency security clearances before we could even attend our own trial on charges of publishing documents we had already published.
- Courtroom windows were specially draped with blackout cloth, presumably to prevent unauthorized lip-readers (Soviet spies? Comsymps from Hanoi?) from watching testimony.
- Reporters had to spend hours explaining the Pentagon Papers to lawyers who had never had to cope with the arcane Pentagon world of classified material, before the lawyers could decide what affidavits they wanted from editors and reporters, or what questions to ask.

Often, Post reporters plainly knew so much more than government prosecutors and government witnesses about U.S. involvement in Vietnam it was almost embarrassing. My favorite ludicrous moment came when Gesell asked some poor deputy assistant secretary of defense, Dennis J. Doolin, to identify the one thing in the Pentagon Papers that would most



damage the interest of the United States if published by The Post. The poor guy blanched. The government lawyers caucused furtively and quickly asked for a recess. We were almost as worried, trying to figure out what they would come up with. (We had collectively read most of the Pentagon Papers, surely more than the government had read, but none of us had read them all.) Finally, the trial resumed. The last question was reread, and the witness responded (you could almost hear the roll of drums): "Operation Marigold."

The more studious defendants among us—Roberts, Marder and Pentagon correspondent George Wilson—had brought a dozen reference books with them to court, just in case, and damned if they weren't able to find quickly three already-published, detailed explanations of Operation Marigold, a June 1966 effort by President Johnson to get representatives of Poland and Italy to explore possible peace settlements with Ho Chi Minh.

As the Pentagon Papers bounced their way from court to court—in New York and Washington—on their way to The Supremes, I made a decision that now makes me blush.

In an effort to be prepared for any eventuality, we had assigned two reporters to go out to Chief Justice Warren Burger's house in nearby Arlington, after trying unsuccessfully to reach him by phone. If the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled for The Post *en banc*, we knew the government would apply to the chief justice for an immediate stay—to stop us from publishing—while it appealed to the Supreme Court. We didn't want the government to sneak out unnoticed to Burger's house, so we sent our own emissaries: Spencer Rich, who normally covered the Senate, and Martin Weil, a former CIA type who worked nights on rewrite as a city reporter.

Together, they walked up the driveway to the chief justice's home and rang the doorbell. It was almost midnight. Marty Weil's memo describes the next few minutes better than I can:

"After about a minute or two, the chief justice opened the door. He was wearing a bathrobe. He was carrying a gun. The gun was in his right hand, muzzle pointed down. It was a long-barreled steel weapon. The chief justice did not seem glad to see us. Spencer explained why we were there. There was a considerable amount of misdirected conversation. It seemed for a bit that people were talking past each other. Spencer, who held up his credentials, was explaining why we were there, but the judge seemed to be saying that we shouldn't have come. Finally, after a little more talk, everybody seemed to understand everybody. The chief justice said it would be all right for us to wait for any possible Justice Department emissaries, but we could wait down the street. He held his gun in his hand throughout a two- or three-minute talk. Sometimes it was not visible, held behind the door post. He never pointed it at us. He closed the door. We went down the street and waited for about three hours. Then we went home."

I was at home when the desk called to report this brief encounter and ask where we should play the story—Page 1, or inside?

"What story?" I shouted. "Just because the chief justice of the United States comes to the door of his

house in the dead of night in his jammies, waving a gun at two Washington Post reporters in the middle of a vital legal case involving The Washington Post, you guys think that's a story?"

Over the years, I have prided myself in recognizing a good story when I see one, even when no one else sees it. This is what I do best. But of course I had momentarily taken leave of my senses. All I could think of was how much Burger disliked the press in general, and The Post in particular, how ridiculous the alleged story would make him look (I could visualize the Herblock cartoon with clarity), and how much I wanted to avoid pissing him off a few days before he took our fate in his hands.

No story, I ruled, and there was no story, until af-

ter the Supreme Court had decided our fate, when Nick von Hoffman slipped it into a column.

No story? I hereby apologize.

On Friday, June 25, the Supreme Court granted certiorari and agreed to hear the case. On Saturday, June 26, the case was argued in the Supreme Court. And on Monday, June 28, 1971—15 days after the New York Times broke the story, and 10 days after The Post's first publication—the Supreme Court ruled for the two newspapers. The next day, both of us resumed our stories about the Pentagon Papers.

For the first time in the history of the American republic, newspapers had been restrained by the government from publishing a story—a black mark in the history of democracy.

We had won—sort of.

What the hell was going on in this country that this could happen?

How could a judge of the highest Court of Appeals in the land, Judge Malcolm R. Wilkey, a Nixon appointee who had been general counsel of the Kennecott Copper Corp. and an Eisenhower appointee

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to the appellate court, seriously argue that the Pentagon Papers "could clearly result in great harm to the nation," bringing about "the death of soldiers, the destruction of alliances, the greatly increased difficulty of negotiation with our enemies, the inability of our diplomats to negotiate?"

How could a president (who was three years from resigning in disgrace) and an attorney general (who was three years later sent to jail himself) and an assistant attorney general (who was 15 years from becoming chief justice of the United States) rush headlong and joyously down this reckless path?

Why this persecution/prosecution when the Pentagon Papers dealt entirely with decisions taken exclusively by Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, and ended some months before the Nixon administration took office?

And how come there was never a peep out of any of the principals when the solicitor general of the United States, who argued the government's case before the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court, the distinguished former dean of the Harvard Law School, Erwin N. Griswold, confessed 18 years later that the government's case against the newspapers was a mirage? "I have never seen any trace of a threat to the national security from the Pentagon Papers' publication. Indeed, I have never seen it even suggested that there was an actual threat," Griswold wrote in a brave—and almost unheard-of—correction of the record in a Feb. 15, 1989, Op-Ed piece in *The Post*.

We had no answers to those questions beyond recognition that the Cold War dominated our society, and realization that the Nixon-Agnew administration was playing hardball.

We did know that the Pentagon Papers experience had forged forever between the Grahams and the newsroom a sense of confidence within *The Post*, a sense of mission and agreement on new goals, and how to attain them. And that may have been the greatest result of publication of the Pentagon Papers.

After the Pentagon Papers, there would be no decision too difficult for us to overcome together.

## Deep Throat

The identity of "Deep Throat," Bob Woodward's super source in Watergate, has been hands-down the best-kept secret in the history of Washington journalism.

Throughout the years, some of the city's smartest journalists and politicians have put their minds to identifying Deep Throat, without success. Gen. Al Haig was a popular choice for a long time, and, especially when he was running for president in the 1988 race, he would beg me to state publicly that he was *not* Deep Throat. He would steam and sputter when I told him that would be hard for me to do for him and not for anyone else. Woodward finally said publicly that Haig was not Deep Throat.

Some otherwise smart people decided Deep Throat was a composite, if he (or she) existed at all. I have always thought it should be possible to identify Deep Throat simply by entering all the information about him in "All the President's Men" into a computer, and then entering as much as possible about all the various

suspects. For instance, who was not in Washington on the days that Woodward reported putting the red-flagged flowerpot on his windowsill, signaling Deep Throat for a meeting?

The quality of Deep Throat's information was such that I had accepted Woodward's desire to identify him to me only by job, experience, access and expertise. That amazes me now, given the high stakes. I don't see how I settled for that, and I would not settle for that now. But the information and the guidance he was giving Woodward were never wrong, never. And it was only after Nixon's resignation, and after Woodward and Bernstein's second book, "The Final Days," that I felt the need for Deep Throat's name. I got it one spring day during lunch break on a bench in McPherson Square. I have never told a soul, not even Katharine Graham, or Don Graham, who succeeded his

mother as publisher in 1979. They have never asked me. I have never commented, in any way, on any name suggested to me. The fact that his identity has remained secret all these years is mystifying, and truly extraordinary. Some doubting Thomases have pointed out that I only knew who Woodward told me Deep Throat was. To be sure. But that was good enough for me then. And now.

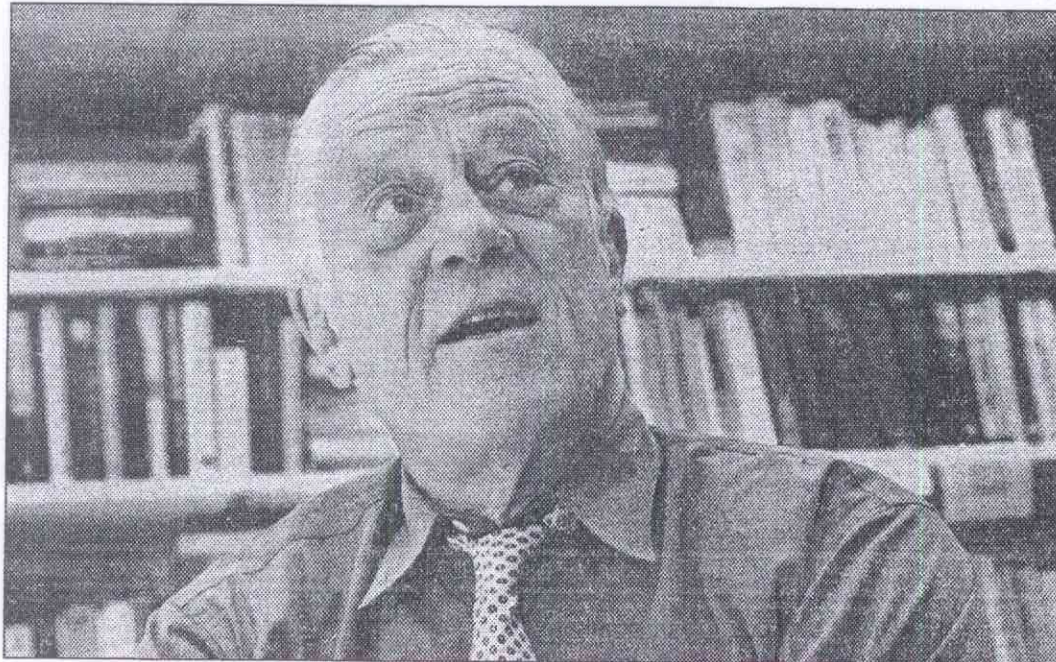
## A State Secret

Editors choose. That's what they do for a living. People first, then subjects, then words. And choosing whether to print anything is often the toughest decision of them all.

In matters of national security, the question quickly boils down to this: Is the security of the nation really at stake, just because someone in authority says it is? The Pentagon Papers, for instance. I learned the answer the hard way: almost never.

One morning in November 1976, Bob Woodward reported to me that although he had only one source, it looked as if a Middle East head of state was on the CIA payroll. That's close to a perfect way to start a day . . . with the promise of an important, exclusive and vital story, and the prospect of some tough work before it was ready to print—or not to print. At this point, Woodward didn't know which head of which state was on the CIA payroll or for how much, although there seemed no lack of candidates. I asked him for a full-court press, and it took him two weeks to come up with the name: King Hussein of Jordan; the dollar amount: about \$1 million a year for 20 years; and some further details. The money was "walking-around" money, not connected either to economic or military aid, which Jordan received regularly. The operation was called "NO/BEEF" inside the CIA. The money had been used variously—including to procure women, when Hussein was little more than a teenager, and to pay for bodyguards for his children when they were old enough to go to boarding school in the United





BY BILL O'LEARY—THE WASHINGTON POST

States.

What we needed now was a second source. Woodward called President Carter's press secretary, Jody Powell, told him everything he knew, and asked for White House comment. Less than a month in office as the spokesman for the president of the United States, Powell replied, "No shit." Next day, someone from the White House (Woodward remembers it to have been Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Council director, and I remember it as Powell) called to ask me whether "it would help you make up your mind [to print or not to print the story] if you could talk to the president."

We were there the next morning for an interview I'll never forget. To be in the Oval Office of the White House with the president of the United States will always blow my mind. Carter had been president for less than a month but looked totally comfortable, poised, friendly and hospitable. He was dressed in a pin-stripe gray suit, and smiling. First, the president said, the story was true. (There was our second source.) Next, he said he had been briefed several times by the outgoing secretary of state (Henry Kissinger) and the outgoing director of the CIA (George Bush), but neither had mentioned that we had a king on our payroll. Third, he had ordered the payments stopped. And fourth, he said he couldn't make the case that others of his staff were making, that the national security was involved.

We had our story.

But, the president added gently, Jordan was vital to the Middle East settlement he had made a priority. Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance was actually in the Middle East, scheduled to see Hussein within the next 48 hours. The president said he would prefer the story not be published but added, "I can't tell you how to run your



business." If we were going to publish the story, he would like 24 hours' notice. On the spot, I promised that we would not run the story that night, and would give him at least a day's notice if we decided to run it. The president talked about the importance of trust. He said he wanted Woodward and me to believe in him. He said he hoped that I would come to see him on "anything." And then he ended the interview, saying, "This is your country and mine."

Back in the office, we agonized. On the one hand, the president had been so straight, so decent, that it seemed almost impolite to print anything he did not want printed. On the other hand, newspapering isn't about being polite or grateful. It's about deciding where the public interest lies. In this case, could we involve ourselves effectively in a Middle East settlement without our negotiators—never mind the public—knowing we "owned" a key participant in that settlement?

We had developed a policy at The Post to help decision-making on matters of national security. We automatically delayed publication for 24 hours as soon as any responsible official invoked national security. Simultaneously, we reached a tentative decision to publish (so that we could arrange for the extra space normally required on a big story), and we appointed a group of reporters expert in the field at issue to talk us out of publishing the story.

We finally came down on the side of publishing. Because the story was true: We did have a king on our payroll, unknown to the public and, until very recently, unknown to the president and to the secretary of state. Because the former CIA director and the former secretary of state had failed to tell the new president, despite hours of briefings. Because the current president would not say that national security was involved. And because effective oversight of the CIA lay somewhere between ludicrous and nonexistent.

The day after the story ran, I got this note from Carter, handwritten on embossed White House stationery:

"To Ben Bradlee,

"I think your publication of the CIA story as the secretary of state was on his Middle East mission and about to arrive in Jordan was irresponsible.

"This is offered by way of editorial comment.

—Jimmy"

I could understand why the president was upset. So was I. I felt we had gone the last mile to be responsible.

When Powell told Carter that I was upset by his letter, the president replied, "Well, [expletive] him."

And I could understand that, too.